

What Is Claimed Is:

1. An article comprising a sheet having first and second major faces directed respectively to first and second sides of the article and adapted to be disposed at least intermittently in use between, to the first side, a part of a person or animal and, to the second side, a surface, the sheet being formed of a substantially impermeable material having perforations provided therethrough, characterised in that there is further provided a plurality of spacer members which project from at least one of the said major faces of the sheet between perforations of the sheet for spacing the sheet from the said part of the person or animal, from the said surface, or from both of these, whereby in use between both the surface and the part of a person or animal the article is breathable to restrict discomfort to the person or animal.

2. A breathable article according to claim 1, wherein the spacer members project from at least the second major face of the sheet for spacing the sheet from the said surface.

3. A breathable article according to claim 2, wherein the spacer members project from only the second major face of the sheet.

4. A breathable article according to claim 1, wherein the spacer members project from at least the first major face of the sheet for spacing the sheet from the person or animal.

5. A breathable article according to claim 4, wherein the spacer members project from only the first major face of the sheet.

6. A breathable article according to any preceding claim, wherein the spacer members project by a distance which is substantially the same

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across the relevant major face of the sheet, so that the article conforms in use to the shape of the person or animal or the surface.

7. A breathable article according to claim 6, wherein the spacer members project from the second major face of the sheet and have a sufficient resilience that the perforations of the sheet remain open during normal use and the second side of the article is not normally pressed against the surface.

Sub A² 8. A breathable article according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the spacer members are discontinuous.

9. A breathable article according to any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the spacer members are continuous.

10. A breathable article according to claim 9, wherein the continuous spacer members extend across substantially all of at least one side of the sheet.

Sub A³ 11. A breathable article according to claim 9 or 10, wherein the spacer members comprise a network of ribs on the respective side or sides of the sheet.

12. A breathable article according to claim 11, wherein an air-permeable sheet cover member extends between adjacent ribs and is secured thereto to enclose an air space between the ribs.

13. A breathable article according to claim 12, wherein the air-permeable sheet cover member comprises a water absorbent fabric.

14. A breathable article according to claim 12, wherein the air-permeable sheet cover member comprises a waterproof but vapour-permeable membrane.

Sub A⁴ 15. A breathable article according to any preceding claim, wherein the sheet further includes a hollow depression or chamber provided in the first major face of the sheet in the region of each perforation.

16. A breathable article according to claim 15, wherein the depression or chamber is so configured and arranged as to permit air passing from the first to the second side of the article to accumulate in the depression or chamber under increased vapour pressure prior to passing out to the second side of the article.

Sub A⁵ 17. A breathable article according to claim 15 or 16, wherein at least one of the depressions or chambers is associated with more than one perforation.

18. A breathable article according to any one of claims 15 to 17, wherein the second major face of the sheet is provided with a dome projection in the region of each perforation, each dome projection corresponding with a hollow depression or chamber of the first major face of the sheet.

19. A breathable article according to any one of the preceding claims, when permanently or releasable affixed to the surface.

20. A breathable article according to any one of the preceding claims, being a cushioning or lining article for locating between a person or animal and a surface selected from the surfaces of apparel and clothing and portions thereof, seats and portions thereof, wheelchairs and portions thereof,

headwear, footwear, body protectors, body armour, sports shields, bedding, upholstery coverings, orthopaedic casts, orthopaedic supports, orthopaedic hard braces, and other articles against which the body of the person or animal, or a portion thereof, can be compressed in use.

21. A breathable article according to any one of claims 1 to 19, being a medical or veterinary dressing.

22. A breathable fabric comprising a sheet having first and second major faces and formed of a substantially impermeable material having perforations provided therethrough, characterised in that there is further provided a plurality of spacer members which project from at least one of the major faces of the sheet between perforations of the sheet for spacing the sheet in use from a part of a person or animal, from a surface, or from both of these on opposite major faces of the sheet.

23. A breathable fabric according to claim 22, wherein the spacer members project from at least the second major face of the sheet for spacing the sheet from the said surface.

24. A breathable fabric according to claim 23, wherein the spacer members project from only the second major face of the sheet.

25. A breathable fabric according to claim 22, wherein the spacer members project from at least the first major face of the sheet for spacing the sheet from the person or animal.

26. A breathable fabric according to claim 25, wherein the spacer members project from only the first major face of the sheet.

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27. A breathable fabric according to any one of claims 22 to 26, wherein the spacer members project by a distance which is substantially the same across the relevant major face of the sheet.

28. A breathable fabric according to any one of claims 22 to 27, wherein the spacer members are discontinuous.

29. A breathable fabric according to any one of claims 22 to 27, wherein the spacer members are continuous.

30. A breathable fabric according to claim 29, wherein the continuous spacer members extend across substantially all of at least one side of the sheet.

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31. A breathable fabric according to claim 29 or 30, wherein the spacer members comprise a network of ribs on the respective side or sides of the sheet.

32. A breathable fabric according to claim 31, wherein an air-permeable sheet cover member extends between adjacent ribs and is secured thereto to enclose an air space between the ribs.

33. A breathable fabric according to claim 32, wherein the air-permeable sheet cover member comprises a water-absorbent fabric.

34. A breathable fabric according to claim 32, wherein the air-permeable sheet cover member comprises a waterproof but vapour-permeable membrane.

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35. A breathable fabric according to any one of claims 22 to 34, wherein the sheet further includes a hollow depression or chamber provided in the first major face of the sheet in the region of each perforation.

36. A breathable fabric according to claim 35, wherein the depression or chamber is so configured and arranged as to permit air passing from the first to the second side of the fabric to accumulate in the depression or chamber under increased vapour pressure prior to passing out to the second side of the fabric.

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37. A breathable fabric according to claim 35 or 36, wherein at least one of the depressions or chambers is associated with more than one perforation.

38. A breathable fabric according to any one of claims 35 to 37, wherein the second major face of the sheet is provided with a dome projection in the region of each perforation, each dome projection corresponding with a hollow depression or chamber of the first major face of the sheet.